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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000460

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [ETRD](#) [CU](#) [BR](#)
SUBJECT: VISIT TO CUBA OF BRAZILIAN FOREIGN MINISTER AMORIM

REF: HAVANA 77

Classified By: A/DCM Greg Adams for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Poloff met with Brazilian DCM Vilmar Coutinho (please protect) to discuss the May 30-31 visit to Cuba of Brazilian foreign minister Celso Amorim. Amorim's visit was a follow-up to Brazilian President Lula da Silva's January 2008 visit to Cuba (Reftel). In addition to meeting with his counterpart, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, Amorim also met with Cuban President Raul Castro. Coutinho himself did not attend this meeting, although Brazilian Ambassador Bernardo Pericas Neto did, as the lone GOB representative. VP Carlos Lage, FM Perez Roque, and Minister of Basic Industries Marta Lomas Morales also attended the meeting between Amorim and Raul Castro. The encounter was described as largely a social one, with the substantive meeting having occurred earlier between Amorim and Perez Roque, which Coutinho had attended. Pericas informed Coutinho that Raul Castro appeared confident and comfortable in his role as Cuba's leader, and described Castro as being well-informed on a range of issues pertaining to the Brazil-Cuba bilateral relationship.

¶2. (C) Coutinho noted that the GOB had not requested an audience with Raul Castro, though they were hoping the GOC would announce that Castro wished to meet with Amorim. Venezuelan FM Nicolas Maduro had received an audience with Castro a week earlier, and the Brazilians felt that it would be a significant gesture if the GOC made Castro available. Coutinho added that Cuban FM Perez Roque received an audience with Brazilian President Lula during an earlier visit to Brazil, and consequently the GOB felt they were owed reciprocal treatment. Amorim also pressed for a commitment by Raul Castro to visit Brazil, but the latter would only say that Brazil would be "one of the first countries he would consider" for his first trip as head of state.

¶3. (C) According to Coutinho, during Amorim's conversation with Raul Castro, the Cuban leader stated that he had no intention of lifting the "tarjeta blanca" restriction on foreign travel by Cuban citizens at anytime in the near future. In response to a query from Amorim, Castro stated firmly that lifting this restriction would result in Cubans departing the island en masse, the bulk of them heading for Mexico. Castro believed this exodus would negatively influence the bilateral relationship between Mexico and Cuba.

¶4. (C) Castro also denied that any significant change to Cuba's dual-currency system was in the works. While he conceded that the Convertible Peso/Ordinary Peso system created deep divisions in Cuban society, he stated that any

change in the exchange rate to favor the ordinary peso would spike inflation in Cuba and lead to devastating food shortages.

¶15. (C) Coutinho described Amorim's proclamation to the press that Brazil wanted to become Cuba's primary trade partner as "unrealistic." He noted that Brazil was not in a position to usurp Venezuela given the hefty subsidies offered to Cuba annually by Chavez. Instead, Coutinho noted that Amorim's words were more a symbol to the GOC of the seriousness with which Brazil viewed its relationship with Cuba.

¶16. (C) Coutinho noted that Brazil saw two concrete benefits from expanding ties with Cuba: 1) Brazil perceives Cuba to be influential within international organizations such as the NAM, and views Cuba's support as key in securing a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and 2) Brazil is seeking to assert itself as a world power beyond South America, and sees Cuba as a stepping stone into the Caribbean and beyond.

¶17. (C) Brazil remains firmly committed to not broach the subject of human rights with Cuba. Coutinho said that doing so would "poison" the environment. He asserted that Raul Castro only expressed an interest in meeting with Amorim because he knew the GOB would not discuss human rights.

¶18. (C) The topic of Fidel Castro was not raised during Amorim's meeting with Raul Castro.

¶19. (C) COMMENT: Brazil sees the establishment of good relations with Cuba as the cornerstone of its Caribbean policy and very much desires a reciprocal visit from Raul

Castro. As Coutinho notes, the trade aspects of the relationship get lip service, but the Brazilians seem realistic about business opportunities in Cuba. Raul Castro may wish very much to make Brazil one of his first foreign visits in order to cement further an economic relationship that can balance the inordinate influence of Venezuela. However, to do so he will either have to visit Venezuela first or have the internal political strength to overcome the perceived snub to Cuba's number one ally that would accrue from going first to Brazil. At the moment neither option may be acceptable.

PARMLY